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Napoleon's Opera-Glass

Napoleon's Opera-Glass

AN HISTRIONIC STUDY

BY

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POPE PIUS VII.

INTRODUCTION

I PURPOSE to treat of Napoleon as a theatre-goer, as a critic and patron of the drama, and as a familiar of playwrights and players. I intend to show that he was himself a master actor on important occasions and an artist in histrionic effects.

We have been entertained of late with chapters on the great man's campaigns and his costumes, his fads and his furniture, his hats and his boots, his witticisms and his women, his swords and his snuff-boxes, his manners and his maxims.

I may be pardoned if I allow my pen to ramble around the opera-glass of Napoleon, merely to indicate what impressions he received through its lenses, and I may be permitted to turn that opera-glass upon himself in order to see how he was affected by these impressions.

The experiment is novel and may prove interesting.

The Lieutenant

B

I

THE LIEUTENANT

ONE night, in 1788, Napoleon Bonaparte, of Corsica, saw Madame Saint Huberti play Didon at the theatre. He was then an unknown artillery officer, a graduate from the military schools of Brienne and Paris. He was sallow, slight, and small. His hair was long. His clothes were threadbare. His purse was light. I do not know whether he placed an opera-glass to his eyes that night, but his eyes were fine, and flared with a restless fire. The opera was by Piccini, the rival of Glück. The actress carried all before her. The artillery officer, they tell us, ventured into verse.

"Romains, qui vous vantez d'une illustre origine,
Voyez d'où dépendait votre empire naissant!
Didon n'a pas d'attrait plus puissant,
Pour arreter la fuite où son amant s'obstine.
Mais si l'autre Didon, ornement de ces lieux,
Eût été reine de Carthage,
Il eût, pour la servir, abandonné ses dieux,
Et votre beau pays serait encore sauvage!"

This madrigal, if addressed by the obscure lieutenant to the famous diva, is a clever fragment of pedantic rhapsody. It would prove not only that Bonaparte, early in his career, took interest in the doings of stageland, but also that his juvenile rhyme was superior in quality to that which has been attributed to Cæsar, to Frederick, and to Washington.

He was at that time a dark dreamer in uniform. He devoured Plutarch and Rousseau. He quoted Mably and Raynal. He admired Rollin and Sterne. He wept over Bacculard and raved over Ossian. When he read aloud, he pronounced his adopted language with a foreign accent, and when he wrote, he sinned with delightful nonchalance against the cardinal rules of orthography. His note-books were full of blots and erasures. He manufactured essays, concocted tales, and compiled histories. His style abounded in mixed metaphors, in exotic idioms, in stilted phrases, and in hollow imitations of current tirades.

His correspondence with his family and his friends, however, had the simple and sincere tone of masterful superiority. Some of those letters are valuable to this day as historical documents. They demonstrate plainly how

eager he was to appear in the first acts of the political drama then moving swiftly towards the crisis.

"This country is full of zeal and ardour," he wrote to Naudin. "In an assembly of twenty-two societies, three departments petitioned in favour of the King being brought to trial. On the occasion of the banquet of the 14th, I proposed a toast to the patriots of Auxonne . . . The southern blood runs through my veins with the rapidity of the Rhone. You must therefore pardon me if you experience some difficulty in reading my scrawl."

"He was then a passionate admirer of Jean Jacques," writes his brother Joseph, "amateur of the chef-d'œuvres of Corneille, Racine, and Voltaire, which we declaimed daily."

He saw plays by Marivaux, Regnard, Beaumarchais, in his lieutenant days, and he hummed airs from the opera by Rousseau. What he thought of these productions we may see later.

I find that he criticised adversely the 'Philinte de Molière' by Fabre d'Eglantine. "It must be admitted," he said of the latter, "that this play was barren of invention. As to its performance on the stage, I saw this piece several times in my youth. I always found

the style uncouth and bizarre for a piece written in the eighteenth century."

Bonaparte was not favourably impressed by Shakespeare, though he heard him interpreted by Talma. He early made the personal acquaintance of the actor, and liked him, but he appears never to have cared for the dramatist. "Shakespeare," said he, later, according to Thibaudeau, "was steeped in oblivion for two hundred years even in England. Suddenly it pleased Voltaire, who lived at Geneva and saw many Englishmen, to praise that author in order to ingratiate himself with them. The word went round that Shakespeare was the foremost writer of the world. I have read him. There is nothing in him that can touch Corneille and Racine. It is impossible to read one of his plays. They are pitiable."

He never had what we nowadays call the historic sense. He then preferred mathematics to belles-lettres, and strategetics to playbooks. He issued virulent political pamphlets and sketched bold plans for military campaigns.

He was a Republican in politics, but his republicanism fitted him as badly as his coat.

He was now sedate and taciturn; now garrulous and volatile.

He impatiently waited his cue.

The General

II

THE GENERAL

BONAPARTE had not long to wait before he became an actor on the stage of history.

He directed, at twenty-four, the capture of Toulon.

Then he returned to the capital. "Bonaparte was without any employment," says Marmont, "I without any command, and Junot attached to the staff of a general who was not in demand. We lived in the Hôtel de la Liberté, Rue des Fossés-Montmartre, passed our time at the Palais Royal and at the theatres, and had very little money and no prospects."

Bonaparte mentioned the theatres, the actresses, in his letters written at this period.

"Luxury, pleasure, and the arts flourish once more here to an astonishing degree," he wrote to his brother Joseph. "Yesterday 'Phèdre' was given at the Opéra for the benefit of a retired actress. There was an immense crowd

at the doors from two o'clock on in the afternoon, though prices had been trebled. . . . Women are seen everywhere—at the theatres, in the promenades, and in the libraries. In the study of the savant, you meet very pretty persons. Here alone, of all places in the world, they deserve to hold the helm; therefore men are mad about them, think only of them, live only by and for them. A woman requires to be but six months in Paris to know what is due to her and the extent of her empire."

"Health, constancy, and never be discouraged," he wrote to Suchy. "If you find men wicked and ungrateful, remember the great, although buffoon, maxim of Scapin: 'Let us be thankful to them for all the crimes they do not commit.'"

Neither Scapin nor Figaro ever uttered this cynical aphorism. Bonaparte quoted inaccurately, but he was never exact in matters literary. He was often eccentric. "We were at the Théâtre-Français," said a contemporary to Stendhal, who reproduces the story. "They gave a comedy, 'Le Sourd,' ou 'L'Auberge Pleine,' and the whole audience was in convulsions of laughter. The rôle of Dasnières was taken by Baptiste, the younger, and never

did anyone play it better. The shouts of laughter were such that the actor was often obliged to stop. . . . Bonaparte alone (and the fact struck me forcibly) maintained an icy silence. . . . We spent six weeks in Paris, and we went with him very often to the fine concerts of Garat, which were then given in the Rue Saint-Marc. . . . There was always originality in the conduct of Bonaparte, for often he disappeared from among us, without a word, and when we thought that he was elsewhere than in the theatre, we spied him in the second or third gallery, alone in a box, having the air of a man who sulks."

I find in the records this letter addressed by Bonaparte to Talma after Toulon. Some writers consider it authentic; others hold it to be apochryphal. "I fought like a lion for the Republic, my dear friend Talma, and as a reward she allows me to starve. . . . I am at the end of my resources. . . . You are fortunate. Your reputation depends on no one. Two hours passed on the boards puts you before the public, which showers glory upon you. We soldiers must buy it on a stage more spacious, and they don't always allow us to get on the stage. . . . I saw Monvel yesterday. He is a

capital friend. Barras makes me fine promises. Will he keep them? I doubt it. Meanwhile, I'm down to my last penny. Have you any ducats that you can spare me? I will not refuse them, and I will reimburse you from the first kingdom I shall conquer with my sword. My friend, the heroes of Aristotle were lucky fellows. They weren't dependent on a Minister of War. Adieu."

Bonaparte presently found his opportunity. Barras became his patron, and Josephine de Beauharnais, his wife. The Government sent him to command the army of Italy, and he began, at twenty-six, his meteoric series of victorious campaigns. His words became almost as brilliant as his deeds. His missives to the ministers at home bristled with bravado. His proclamations to the soldiers in the field were dotted with daredeviltry.

At this period of his life he already felt that he was playing a part. He posed well in the limelight glare of publicity. He delivered his lines so that they carried. Already we recognize that where he stands or rides, there is the centre of the boards.

I cannot insist too strongly upon the existence of the histrionic element in the composition of

the man. I detect its manifestations everywhere. Whether he unveils the monument to Hoche, or pays a visit to the tomb of Virgil, or refuses to accept in person the sword of his veteran adversary Wurmser, I suspect that he is acting to the stalls and the gallery, and doing it with calculated skill. He seemed ever to remember the chivalric characters which he admired behind the footlights. Versed in the classic drama, the influence of that drama is patent in his words and his postures.

When Bonaparte took command of the army, he at once issued one of his declamatory proclamations.

"Soldiers, you are naked, ill-fed; the Government owes you much and has nothing to give you. Your patience and the courage you have shown in the midst of these rocks are admirable; but they procure you no glory; no brilliancy is reflected on you. I desire to lead you into the most fertile plains in the world. Rich provinces and great cities will be in your power. You will find there honour, glory, and wealth. Soldiers of Italy, will you be wanting in courage and constancy?"

There was always a dramatic fervour in his harangues.

"Soldiers," he rhapsodized from Milan, "you have dashed like a torrent from the summit of the Apennines. You have overthrown, dispersed, scattered all who opposed your march. Piedmont, delivered from Austrian tyranny, has given vent to her natural sentiments of peace and friendship towards France. Milan is ours, and the Republican flag floats over all Lombardy. The dukes of Parma and Medina owe their political existence entirely to your generosity. The army which menaced you with such arrogance finds nothing to protect it against your courage. The Po, the Tessin, the Adda did not stop you a single day. Those boasted bulwarks of Italy were found wanting! . . . Shall posterity reproach us with having found a Capua in Lombardy? . . . Let us be doing! We have still forced marches to make, enemies to subdue, laurels to gather, insults to avenge!"

Barras and Carnot received from him such rhodomontades as this:

"I owe you special thanks for your attentions towards my wife. I recommend her to you. She is a sincere patriot, and I love her to madness. I hope to be able, if things go well, to send you ten million francs to Paris, which will not be amiss for the army of the Rhine. I

cannot conceal the fact that since the death of Stengel, I have not a fighting cavalry commander. I wish you would send me two or three adjutant-generals who have served in the cavalry, who have been under fire, and who have the firm resolution never to make scientific retreats."

I have remarked that Bonaparte was already playing a part. How else explain these words which, in 1797, he addressed to Talleyrand, Minister of Foreign Affairs—like himself, a past master in histrionic art?

"Since I have been in Italy," he wrote, "I have received no aid from the love of the people for liberty and equality. My only true auxiliaries have been the good discipline of the army and the respect which we have shown for religion, which has been carried to the extent of cajoling its ministers. . . . This is history. The remainder, which is all very fine in proclamations, printed discourses, and so forth, is so much romance."

During the past two years I have endeavoured to make an exhaustive study of the mental traits of Bonaparte, and in that quest I have groped my way through an intricate mass of literature produced mostly by his contemporaries. I have

read conflicting memoirs, pamphlets, poems, and letters about him, as well as his own letters and his own state papers. I have come to the conclusion that the most reliable clue to his character is to be found in his own correspondence. I do not mean his letters intended for the public, but his unstudied and unconventional missives to partisans. There he revealed himself with approximate truth. There, as a player in a dressing-room, he spoke every-day language and discarded official trappings. When off the stage, he was often coarse and commonplace. When on the stage, he appeared grandiose and profound, and postured for posterity.

The greater his success, the more intense became his self-reliance. "Do you suppose," he said in the hearing of Miot de Mélito, "that to make great men out of Directory lawyers, the Carnots and the Barras, I triumph in Italy? Do you suppose, also, that it is for the establishment of a Republic? What an idea! A Republic of thirty million men! With our customs, our vices, how is that possible? It is a delusion which the French are infatuated with, and which will vanish along with so many others. What they want is glory, the

gratification of vanity—they know nothing about liberty. Look at the army! Our successes, just attained, our triumphs, have already brought out the true character of the French soldier. I am all for him. Let the Directory deprive me of the command, and it will see if it is master. A nation needs a chief, who is famous through his exploits, and not theories of government, phrases, and speeches by ideologists, which Frenchmen do not comprehend."

While Bonaparte was in Italy, Talma created the title rôle in 'Oscar,' a drama by Arnault, produced at the Théâtre de la République in Paris. The play met with favour, and the dramatist sent a copy to the General beyond the Alps with this inscription:

"Toi, dont la jeunesse occupée
Aux jeux d'Apollon et de Mars,
Comme le premier des Césars
Manie et la plume et l'épée,
Qui peut-être au milieu des camps
Rédiges d'immortels mémoires,
Dérobe-leur quelques instants
Et trouve, s'il se peut, le temps
De me lire entre deux victoires!"

Bonaparte, meanwhile, at regular intervals, sent epistles to Josephine that resembled those

which lovers on the stage indite to their mistresses.

"You are coming, are you not, my darling?" wrote he. "You will soon be here by my side, and I can hold you in my arms, close to my heart, which beats only for you! O, take wings, beloved, and fly to me!" . . . "I hope ere long," he continued, "to clasp you in my arms and to cover you with a million kisses hot as those given beneath the equator!" . . . . "Show me some of your faults. Be less beautiful, less gracious, tender and good. Above all, never be jealous, and never weep, for your tears drive me crazy. They fire my blood!"

His reverberating words were ever followed by lightning deeds.

"Soldiers," he gloried, "in fifteen days you have gained six victories, captured twenty-one standards, fifty-five guns, several strong places, conquered the richest portion of Piedmont. You have made fifteen thousand prisoners and have killed or wounded ten thousand men. . . . Hitherto you have fought for sterile rocks, which bear witness to your courage, but which were useless to the country. To-day you equal by your services the armies of Holland and of the Rhine. Devoid of everything, you have sup-

plied everything. You have gained battles without guns, passed rivers without bridges, accomplished forced marches without shoes, bivouacked without brandy and often without bread. . . . To-day you are amply provided for. The magazines captured from the enemy are numerous; the siege and field pieces have arrived. . . . I promise you the conquest of Italy—but on one condition."

Bonaparte checked the enthusiasm of his men with masterly effect.

"You must swear to respect the people you deliver," continued he, "and repress the horrible pillage in which scoundrels, excited by the enemy, have indulged. Without that, you will not be liberators, but a pestilence, and your victories, your courage, your success, and the blood of your brothers who have perished, will all be lost, as well as honour and glory."

They greeted him with joyous shouts when, after his splendid feats of arms, he showed himself in Paris. They applauded him in the streets, in the public squares, and in the theatres. Chénier wrote a hymn in his honour. Méhul set it to music. Lebrun, the poet, sang:

"Héros, cher à la paix, aux armes, à la victoire,
Il conquit en deux ans mille siècles de gloire!"

Barras, jealous of the popular idol, in his memoirs gives this pen picture of him. The picture, as you notice, accentuates the theatric proclivities of Bonaparte.

"He had for a long time been taciturn, until the moment arrived when his marriage was settled upon, and he obtained command of the army of Italy. Thereupon he seemed a prey to the maddest joy; and every time after dining with me he thought he could let himself go in the presence of my guests, he would ask my leave to close the door in order to be free to play comedy. This comedy was always a genuine improvisation, the idea of which was sometimes supplied to him, and he would instantly dialogise, himself playing several parts simultaneously; he would ask my leave to take off his coat, and taking table-cloths and table-napkins, would suddenly emerge in the most grotesque disguises; although the delivery of his improvisations was not very fluent, he nevertheless adopted every inflection of voice at his command to give variety to the scenes, and he managed to do so fairly well."

Readers of the 'Journal des Débats' came across this: "They gave, day before yesterday, at the Théâtre de la République et des Arts, the

second performance of 'Horatius Cocles.' The announcement of this piece had attracted an immense house. General Bonaparte appeared. Although he was not in uniform, and had taken pains to hide himself at the back of the box (second tier, facing the stage), he was discovered by the audience, which immediately broke into unanimous and continued applause and shouts of 'Vive Bonaparte!'

"The modesty of the young hero seemed to suffer by reason of this reception. He said to someone in a neighbouring box: 'If I had known that the boxes are so exposed to view, I would not have come.'"

"After these ovations," says Marmont, "General Bonaparte affected the greatest simplicity. He avoided showing himself in public, and this feigned modesty, in no way to his taste, was well calculated by him, for it increased his popularity."

During these eventful months, Lemercier wrote his tragedy 'Ophis,' the scenes of which were laid on the banks of the Nile. Bonaparte was already meditating upon his expedition to that then mysterious realm.

One evening the dramatist was invited to the General's house, and asked to read his play.

Among the guests were Desaix, Kléber, Monge, Berthollet, Laplace, and Fourrier. The play seemed to meet with approval. Bonaparte shook the poet's hand, and said: "You have created a magnificent theme, which perhaps will be found more timely than you think." The General confided to the dramatist his intention of conquering Egypt, and asked him to be a member of the expedition. Lemercier did not accept this invitation, but his piece was played on the day when the public learned of more victories. They voted it a success, for they thought that they saw an allusion to the favourite of the hour in these lines:

> "Il court pour son pays de victoire en victoire,
> Son génie accomplit tous ses rêves de gloire."

He then lived in a house in the Rue Chantereine purchased by him from Talma. He held select receptions there. On one occasion, while Madame Tallien was present, Arnault remarked, in the course of the conversation, that he had brought home a curious yataghan from his travels.

"What have you done with it?" asked Bonaparte.

"I gave it to Talma," answered Arnault.

"That is like a poet," said Bonaparte.

"Those gentlemen pay court even to the kings of the theatre."

"I do not pay court even to heroes," frankly retorted Arnault. "I pay court only to the ladies. Madame is here to bear me out."

On the night of the 3rd of March, 1798, Bonaparte dined at Barras', and went thence to the Théâtre-Français, where they played the 'Macbeth' of Shakespeare maltreated by Ducis. After the performance, the General bade his friends farewell, left quietly for Toulon, and embarked for Egypt.

I shall not dwell upon Bonaparte's expedition. There was a group of savants in his train. He also had Rigel, as piano-player, Villoteau, as singer, and Grandmaison, as poet. Bourrienne was his private secretary. Lavalette was his reader. I shall not detail how he assisted Arnault in writing a tragedy on ship board. The dramatist later acknowledged that the fifth act of 'Les Vénetiens' was the work of his superior. Bonaparte, during that expedition, assumed theatric attitudes, dressed in theatric garb, and drafted theatric fanfaronades. He came back from the land of the sphinx a changed man. He was more ambitious than ever. He was no longer an admirer of Rous-

seau, whose sentimentality and whose sociology were now equally distasteful to him.

"I am especially disgusted with Rousseau," said he to Roederer, "since I've seen the Orient. Man in the wild state is a dog."

The Consul

III

THE CONSUL

BONAPARTE was not slow to take advantage of of the civic discord which he found prevalent in France when he again set his foot upon her soil. He secretly intrigued for mightier and more undivided sway, on the one hand, and he issued proclamations to the people and to the army on the other.

"Frenchmen," he declaimed, "on my return to France, I found division reigning amongst all the authorities. They agreed only on this single point, that the Constitution was half destroyed, and was unable to protect liberty! Each party in turn came to me, confided to me their designs, and requested my support. I refused to be a man of a party. . . . I presented myself before the Council of the Five Hundred, alone, unarmed, my head uncovered. . . . My object was to restore to the majority the expres-

sion of its will, and to restore to it its power. The stilettoes, which had menaced the deputies, were instantly raised against their deliverer. Twenty assassins rushed upon me, and aimed at my breast. The grenadiers of the legislative body, whom I had left at the door of the hall, ran forward and placed themselves between me and the assassins.

"One of these brave grenadiers had his coat pierced by a stiletto. They bore me off.

"At the same moment, cries of 'Outlaw him' were raised against the defender of the law. It was the horrid cry of assassins against the power destined to repress them.

"They crowded around the President, uttering threats. With arms in their hands, they commanded him to declare the outlawry. I was informed of this. I ordered him to be rescued from their fury, and six grenadiers of the legislative body brought him out. Immediately afterwards, some grenadiers of the legislative body charged into the hall and cleared it.

"The factions, intimidated, dispersed and fled. The majority, freed from their assaults, returned freely and peaceably into the hall, listened to the propositions made for public safety, deliberated, and drew up the salutary

resolutions which will become the new and provisional law of the Republic."

By theatric devices, thus theatrically described, Bonaparte was soon most comfortably established at the Malmaison. He was the virtual master of the country. He took interest in everything, interfered in everything, and had his eye everywhere and on everyone. He inspired pamphlets. He edited newspaper articles.

It is not odd that he occasionally focussed his opera-glass upon the stage, for he soon recognized that the drama is an important means of working upon public opinion. He quickly discerned that his adopted countrymen were swayed by the scenic and spectacular. He established pomp and show at his court and in his camps. There was soon an elaborate etiquette. Presently he inaugurated parades and pageants.

I see him walking up and down in his study, his hands clasped at his back, dictating a note like this to Lucien:

"The Consuls of the Republic desire that you will inform the managers of the different theatres that no dramatic work ought to be accepted without their permission. The head of the department of Public Instruction should be held responsible for the performance of all pieces

contrary to good morals and social order. . . . The First Consul would see with pleasure the suppression of the couplet alluding to him in the 'Tableau des Sabines.'"

Bonaparte shared the opinion of Fletcher, of Saltoun, on the potency of popular song. "I beg," he again dictated to Lucien, "you will ask the citizens Lebrun and Rouget de l'Isle to write a 'Hymne aux Combats' to a well-known air like the 'Marseillaise,' or the 'Chant du Départ.' This hymn must contain things applicable to all the circumstances of war, and propound the idea that peace follows in the train of victory."

Grassini, the operatic diva, fascinated him during his campaign in Italy. I cannot tell whether it was her voice or her person that enlisted his passing fancy, but he besieged her gallantly, and she soon displayed the white fichu of surrender. I need hardly add that the complaisant siren later obtained an engagement in the capital, as well as golden tokens of the soldier's appreciation.

Bonaparte never forgot a favour nor forgave an injury.

Andrieux, the dramatist, was one of the few men who then had the pluck to tell the master

the truth. Alluding to the flatterers who surrounded him, and the feebleness of their support, he said one day:

"Citizen First Consul, you can never lean except upon that which resists."

Fouché offered Andrieux the post of censor. "Look you, Citizen Minister," jauntily replied the playwright, "my role is to be hanged, not to be the hangman."

Bonaparte entertained singular notions respecting literary copyrights. On hearing that a piece entitled 'Misanthropie et Repentir' had been brought out at the Odéon, he said to his private secretary, who had a hand in it:

"Bourrienne, you have been robbed!"

"How, General?"

"You have been robbed, I tell you, and they are now acting your piece."

Bourrienne explained that he had merely translated the play from the original by Kotzebue, but the master, who liked the play, and often went to see it acted, persisted that the work was his secretary's property. This man, who appropriated works of art with a soldier's ruthless hand and eliminated the boundaries of states with the stroke of a diplomat's casuistic pen, was most scrupulous on the subject of literary property.

I have observed that Bonaparte became less partisan of Rousseau as he advanced in years. Stanislas de Girardin has left us an account of a visit of the Consul to the tomb of the philosopher, and his account of the visit gives weight to this opinion.

The First Consul paused before the tomb of Jean Jacques, and said that it would have been better for the repose of France had this man never existed.

"And why so, Citizen Consul?" asked Girardin.

"It was he who prepared the French Revolution. I should not have thought, Citizen Consul, that you had any reason to complain of the Revolution."

"Well," answered he, "the future will show whether it would not have been better for the peace of the world that neither I nor Rousseau had ever lived."

And so saying, he continued his walk with a dreamy air.

There is a volume of significance in that walk. We can readily picture Bonaparte making that remark and slowly moving away, conscious that he was being observed. He had an eye to mise-en-scène always. One day he asked Ségur what people would say of him after his death.

Ségur politely enlarged upon the regrets which would be universally expressed. "Not at all," replied Bonaparte; and then, drawing in his breath in a significant manner, indicative of the universal relief, he added, "They'll say 'Ouf!'"

"All was calculation with Bonaparte," says Bourrienne. "To produce effect was his highest gratification. He let slip no opportunity of doing or saying things to dazzle the multitude. He congratulated himself on having paid a visit to Daubenton, at the Jardin des Plantes, and talked with great complacency of the distinguished way in which he had treated the contemporary of Buffon."

He had a certain penchant for amateur theatricals at his court. Beaumarchais' 'Barbier de Seville' was a play much to his taste. On one occasion, when Lauriston, his aide-de-camp, acted Almaviva, Hortense, his step-daughter, Rosina, Eugène, his step-son, Basil, he laughed heartily at the halting histrionism of these parlour players. On another occasion, when his brother Lucien attempted the leading male part in the 'Alzire' of Voltaire, and his sister Elisa essayed the leading female part, he bantered them unmercifully. "I think we

have seen 'Alzire' beautifully parodied," he said.

Bonaparte thought little of literature in those stirring times. He took literature, as he took snuff: he merely sniffed at it. He despised literary hacks like Barère and Lebrun. He hated ideologists like Necker and Lafayette.

In spite of his growing positivism, however, he retained his love of the old dramatic poets, and quoted them readily. Madame de Rémusat relates that, on the evening before the execution of the Duc d'Enghien, while she was playing at chess with the master, he said in a low voice, "Soyons amis, Cinna," and then repeated the following lines from the 'Alzire' of Voltaire:

"Des dieux que nous servons connais la différence.
Les tiens t'ont commandé le meutre et la vengeance;
Et le mien, quand ton bras vient de m'assassiner,
M'ordonne de te plaindre et de te pardonner!"

I have already given one proof of the Consul's opinion of the value of songs. Here is another:

"I beg you will have a song written for the invasion of England to the tune of the 'Chant du Départ'; have several songs written upon the subject, to different airs," he instructed Chaptal.

"I know that several comedies appropriate to

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible] calle[d] Philippe Auguste, which contained allusions to the First Consul, and had brought the manuscript to him. Bonaparte took it into

D—2

his head to read this production aloud to me. It was amusing to hear a man, who was always in a hurry when he had nothing to do, trying to read Alexandrine verses, of which he did not know the metre, and pronouncing them so badly that he did not seem to understand what he read. Besides, he no sooner opened any book than he wanted to criticise it. I asked him to give me the manuscript, and I read it out myself. Then he began to talk; took the play out of my hand, struck out whole passages, made several notes, and found fault with the plot and the characters. He did not run much risk of spoiling the piece, for it was very bad. Singularly enough, when he had done reading it, he told me he did not wish the author to know that all these erasures and corrections were made by so important a hand, and he directed me to make them myself. I objected to this, as may be supposed. I had great difficulty in convincing him that, as it might be thought strange that even he should thus have meddled with an author's manuscript, it would be contrary to all the 'convenances' for me to have taken such a liberty. 'Well, well,' he said, 'perhaps you are right; but, on this, as on every other occasion, I own I do not like that vague and

levelling phrase the 'convenances,' which you women are always using.'

'But,' I replied, 'is not the application of these laws to the conduct of life like that of dramatic unities to the drama? They give order and regularity, and they do not really trammel genius, except when it would, without their control, err against good taste.'

'Ah, 'good taste!' That is another of those classical words which I do not adopt. It is, perhaps, my own fault; but there are certain rules which mean nothing to me. For example, what is called 'style,' good or bad, does not affect me. I care only for the force of the thought. I used to like Ossian, but it was for the same reason which made me delight in the murmur of the wind and waves. In Egypt, I tried to read the Iliad; but I got tired of it. As for French poets, I understand none of them except Corneille. That man understood politics, and, if he had been trained to public affairs, he would have been a statesman. I think I appreciate him more truly than anyone else does, because I exclude all the dramatic sentiments from my view of him. For example, it is only lately I have come to understand the denouement of 'Cinna.' At first I regarded it

as merely a contrivance for a pathetic fifth act; for really, clemency, properly speaking, is such a poor little virtue, when it is not founded on policy, that to turn Augustus suddenly into a kind-hearted prince appeared to me an unworthy climax. However, I saw Monvel act in the tragedy one night, and the mystery of the great conception was revealed to me. He pronounced the 'Soyons amis, Cinna,' in so cunning and subtle a tone that I saw at once the action was only a feint of the tyrant, and I approved as a calculation what had appeared to me silly as a sentiment. The line should always be so delivered that, of all those who hear it, only Cinna is deceived!'

'As for Racine, he pleases me in 'Iphigénie.' That piece, while it lasts, makes one breathe the poetic air of Greece. In 'Britannicus,' he has been trammelled by Tacitus, against whom I am prejudiced, because he does not sufficiently explain his meaning. The tragedies of Voltaire are passionate, but they do not go deeply into human nature. For instance, his 'Mahomet' is neither a prophet nor an Arab. He is an impostor, who might have been educated at the Ecole Polytechnique, for he uses power as I might use it in an age like the

present. And then, the murder of the father by the son is a useless crime. Great men are never cruel, except from necessity."

"As for comedy, it interests me about as much as the gossip of your drawing rooms. I understand your admiration of Molière, but I do not share it; he has placed his personages in situations which have no attractions for me."

Playwrights often had the faculty of irritating the master. Dupaty, the farceur, published a light operette called "L'Antichambre," in which the adulators of the day were mildly ridiculed, and three valets were made to ape the manners and even the dress of the three men in power. When this operette was produced, the Consul is said to have been highly incensed. He ordered that the actors be exposed at the Grêve in the costumes which they had dared to assume, and that they should there be stripped by the executioner, and he further commanded that Dupaty be sent to San Domingo. When Josephine heard of this extreme measure, she interceded in behalf of the author, and the matter was dropped.

Alexandre Duval was another playwright who wrote against the official grain at the time. His play, 'Edouard en Ecosse,' was objected

to by the police, because in it the audiences applauded the exiled Stuarts, and by inference, the exiled Bourbons. Duval deemed it wise to absent himself for a time. When he came back he was more prudent, and at the request of Picard, a politically colourless comedian, he was even appointed manager of one of the large theatres of the capital.

Bonaparte now became more and more bellicose in spirit, and more and more verbose in style. His word was law, he knew it, and he cared less and less how he expressed himself. His handwriting, always difficult to read, became more and more hieroglyphic. Lord Holland says that he seldom wrote, but dictated much.

"It was difficult to follow him, and he often objected to any revision of what he had dictated. When a word had escaped his amanuensis, and he was asked what it was, he would answer, somewhat pettishly: 'Je ne répéterai pas le mot. Réfléchissez, rappelez-vous du mot que j'ai dicté, et écrivez-le, car moi, je ne le répéterai pas.'"

I still detect the actor in Bonaparte. During his blustering interview, for instance, with Lord Whitworth, Ambassador of Great Britain, he

played a part. He raved, walked up and down, scowled, and apostrophised. Count Marcoff and Chevalier Azzara, who were standing together at a little distance, observed that memorable scene. The Consul addressed his remarks to them as well as to the Ambassador.

"The English want war," he exclaimed, "but if they are the first to draw their swords from the scabbards, I shall be the last to sheathe the sword again! They don't respect treaties! Henceforth treaties must be covered with crape!"

His anger was often only simulated. Bonaparte seemed to be a believer in the doctrine of Diderot that players, in order to be masters of their art, should never really feel the deep emotions which they endeavour to express. Thus, after an explosion, he later remarked to Abbé de Pradt, "You thought I was very angry, didn't you? Well, disabuse yourself. With me anger never goes beyond this." And Bonaparte indicated the [illegible] conveying to his auditor that with him passion never rose to the head, and never deprived him of reason.

At the [illegible] Bonaparte [illegible] [illegible] and yawned. "I pity you," said [illegible]

rand to Rémusat, "You are compelled to amuse a man who cannot be amused."

Madame de Rémusat furnishes another sample of bookish conversations at the Malmaison.

"Madame Bonaparte," says she, "began to talk of a tragedy (I do not know what it was) which was then being performed. On this, the First Consul passed the living authors in review, and spoke of Ducis, whose style he did not admire. He deplored the mediocrity of our tragic poets, and said that, above everything in the world, he should like to recompense the author of a fine tragedy. I ventured to say that Ducis had spoilt the 'Othello' of Shakespeare. This long English name coming from my lips produced a sensation among our silent and attentive audience in epaulettes. Bonaparte did not altogether like anything English being praised. We argued the point awhile. All I said was very commonplace; but I had named Shakespeare, I had held my own against the Consul, I had praised an English author. What audacity! What a prodigy of erudition! I was obliged to keep silence for several days after."

Bonaparte gave a theatre party at St. Cloud one night. The Diplomatic Corps was present. The play was the 'Esther' of Racine. After

the tragedy, the curtain was rung down, the spectators were about to leave the theatre, when the curtain was again raised. An actor made his appearance with a roll of paper in his hand and read on ode written by Fontanes. The ode was an acrid attack on the English. Miot de Mélito, who recounts the incident, says that the ode was composed and recited at the express command of the Consul, who had read the poem in private before it was read aloud in public, and who had even increased the strength and point of certain passages.

The Diplomatic Corps was shocked at this unusual proceeding, but Bonaparte seldom neglected an opportunity to startle or to stun.

Arnault brought him the last act of 'Les Vénetiens' and read it to him. The Consul was curt in his disapproval of the climax. He was averse to so tame and trite an ending as the happy union of the hero and the heroine.

"Your hero ought to die," said he. "You must kill him. Yes, kill him!"

Bonaparte never underestimated the influence exerted by the dramatic profession.

"I wish you would send a company of French comedians to Egypt," he dictated to Chaptal.

"The state of prosperity in which the army of the East finds itself, and its idleness in the great city of Cairo, renders this matter, which, at first sight, may appear trivial, necessary, even from a political point of view. A sufficient number of artists might be found at Marseilles and Toulon. . . I should not regret spending forty thousand francs in this affair. . ."

He wrote in the same tenor to Laplace, the astronomer, who was then at the head of the navy department. "The Consuls of the Republic charge me, Citizen Minister, to ask you, without loss of time, to compose a troupe of comedians for Egypt. It will be well to add some ballet girls."

Meanwhile Bonaparte was most censorious as to what was going on the boards at home. They played the 'Mérope' of Voltaire at Lyons one night. Talma and Raucourt were in the bill. The line—

"Le premier qui fût roi fût un soldat heureux"—

was much applauded because the public thought it alluded to their successful leader.

Bonaparte was in a temper, and summoned Chaptal, and asked him why he had allowed that piece to be produced. The minister explained

as best he could. "I don't wish that play to be performed here or in Paris. What's the meaning of this popular line:

'Le premier qui fit roi fit un soldat heureux'?

"I say that a man who raises himself to a throne is the foremost man of his time. There is no luck about it. There's merit on the one hand and gratitude on the other. And, then, what is the meaning of these tirades against Poliphonte who conducts himself as a man of honour towards Mérope? Why have him killed? What are the motives? He alone does his duty. The others are assassins. I don't want that piece played again."

He let pass no chance to bring himself before the public. He veiled his ambitious projects in the most specious language. When Washington died, Bonaparte issued a pompous proclamation praising that leader, and Fréron was asked to deliver an eulogy upon the deceased. In this eulogy Bonaparte was extolled, by comparison and inference, in more laudatory terms than was Washington.

Kings were now made and unmade by the man. It would have been strange, indeed, if he had not himself aspired to wear a crown.

He proceeded cautiously, however. One night, during the King of Etruria's visit in Paris, Bonaparte took him to see the 'Oedipe' of Voltaire, at the Comédie-Française. The audience applauded the line in which Philoctète says:

"J'ai fait des souverains et n'ai pas voulu l'être."

The application was marked, and the audience saw it, and understood the actor who said that he had made sovereigns but did not wish to be one himself. "The fools," exclaimed Bonaparte. "They shall see! They shall see!"

They soon saw.

The Emperor

IV

THE EMPEROR

NAPOLEON was soon absolute master. The once penniless military adventurer soon placed upon his head the imperial crown. Statesmen, jurists, litterateurs, soldiers, scientists, and diplomats did him homage. He familiarly pinched the ears of ladies in the drawing-room and had gentlemen read to him the papers and pamphlets of the day in the study.

Talleyrand says that he did the work of four men. He did all his work rapidly. He ate like a chief of banditti. He took hot baths to keep his flesh down like an athlete. He had himself massaged with brutal violence like an ascetic. He was direct in his questions and diffuse in his answers. He tore open with his fingers the pages of books that he read. He tired out his secretaries when he dictated. He cajoled or crushed, as suited his policy, poets, playwrights,

preachers, journalists, and song writers. He killed news and fabricated news, as he deemed necessary. He opened private letters. He inspired military bulletins which for picturesque mendacity rival the tales of modern circus managers. He superintended the manufacture of school books and edited official catechisms. He indicated how historians should write history and how preachers should preach sermons. Nothing escaped him. Nothing was too minute for his gigantic brain.

Stendhal, one of the shrewdest observers of that time, made the following entry in his diary on July 14, 1804. "We see B. perfectly. He passes at fifteen paces from us. . . . He is on a beautiful white horse, in a fine new coat, black hat, uniform of Colonel of the Guards. . . . He salutes continually and smiles. 'Tis the stage smile of the actor who shows his teeth, but whose eyes are without smiles."

Napoleon now more than ever indulged in histrionic mummery, and, amid martial music and blatant panegyrics, distributed eagles and crosses. He brooked no critic near his throne. He set spies on Benjamin Constant, and he banished Madame de Stael.

One day, Chateaubriand wrote a review for

the 'Mercure de France,' in which he said: "'Tis in vain that Nero prospers. Tacitus is already born in the empire. Soon the author of the Annals will expose the deified tyrant, as nothing more than a histrion, an incendiary, and a parricide."

Napoleon appeared wild with indignation. "What!" he shouted. "Does Chateaubriand think I am a fool, that I do not know what he means? If he goes on in this way, I will have him sabred on the steps of the Tuileries."

Madame de Rémusat, we have seen, dwelt upon Napoleon's admiration of Corneille. Madame Junot, Duchess d'Abrantès, is another authority on this point. Her account of the conversation between the Emperor and Cardinal Maury is well known.

"How is it you do not like Corneille?"

"Sire," replied the Cardinal, "I admire Corneille, but I like Racine."

"And I accuse your Racine of affectation in all his love scenes," said the Emperor, "for love he must have in all his plays; it is essential to the piece as a prompter to the actors. None but young people can possibly like Racine. And how, diable, can you, Monsieur le Cardinal, set up for a champion of Racine, the ladies' poet?

Give me Corneille! He is the man who knew the world."

"And how should he come by his knowledge, since he saw no one?"

The Emperor cast a contemptuous look at the Cardinal, as if he now measured him for the first time.

"That is precisely why I maintain that Corneille is a great man. At a distance from courts, from intrigues and from business, he guessed, as it were, the true situation of empires; sovereigns, and people. The great Condé, on seeing some piece of Corneille's represented—I believe it was 'Sertorious'—exclaimed, 'Where did Corneille learn the art of war?" "And I say," added the Emperor, "that for Corneille's fine tragedies to be justly appreciated, the audience should be composed of kings, ministers, and great functionaries."

Napoleon had a habit of depreciating Racine and Voltaire, but we find that he quoted them frequently.

"He would glance over the titles of his books," remarks Méneval, "saying a word of praise or of blame of the authors, and would linger with preference over the tragedies of Corneille, 'Zaire,' or Voltaire's 'La Mort de

César,' or 'Brutus.' He would read tirades from the tragedies aloud, then would shut up the book and walk up and down, reciting verses from 'La Mort de César.' The passages which he recited with the greatest pleasure were the following:

> 'J'ai servi, commandé, vaincu, quarante années;
> Du monde, entre mes mains, j'ai vu les destinées;
> Et j'ai toujours connu, qu'en chaque évènement
> Le destin des états dépendait d'un moment!'

"When he was tired of reading or writing, he would begin to sing in a strong but false voice."

Napoleon and Talma were excellent friends. One morning, after a performance of 'Britannicus,' the actor presented himself at the palace. The Emperor was busy dictating at the time, but he stopped his work, and chatted with his stage guest. The subject of conversation was the performance of the preceding night.

"Your impersonation of Nero," said the imperial critic, "does not make sufficiently clear the struggle going on between a depraved nature and a good education. I should also like it were you to make fewer gestures. Such a nature as Nero's is not expansive, but self-concentrated. On the other hand, I cannot

sufficiently praise the simple and natural form to which you have reduced tragedy. Come to think of it, men in authority, whether they owe their power to birth or talent, whether they are agitated by passion or lost in deep thought, may speak in a higher key than usual, but they should, for all that, speak in a natural manner. At this very moment, for instance, we are speaking in a conversational tone and yet we are making history."

Napoleon was often as melancholy as the most melancholy of histrionic heroes.

Amid the splendours of his palace, gloomy thoughts often came to him. Alexander the Great and his triumphs would not let him rest. "I come too late," he said regretfully to Decrès. "There is no longer anything great to accomplish. I admit that my career is brilliant, that I have made my way successfully. But what a difference in comparison with antiquity! Take Alexander! After having conquered Asia, and proclaimed himself to the people as the son of Jupiter, with the exception of Olympias, who knew what all this meant, and Aristotle, and a few Athenian pedants, the entire Orient believed him. . . . People nowadays know too much. Nothing is left to do."

He, however, found an abundance of occupations.

"I am always at work," he was wont to boast. "I work at dinner, in the theatre. I wake up at night to resume my work. I got up last night at two o'clock to examine the army reports sent me by the Minister of War. I found twenty mistakes in them, made notes on them, which I have this morning sent to the Minister."

"I have my reports on positions always on hand," said he. "My memory for an Alexandrine line is not good, but I never forget a syllable of my reports on positions."

There was a supercilious tone in some of his letters, mingled with a diabolical sarcasm. "Cousin, where did you discover," he asked Cambacérès, "that Spain had entered the coalition? We are on the best of terms with Spain. All her fortresses are in our hands."

Then, again, he assumed the tone of overbearing curtness. "My intention is," he wrote to Mortier, "that the house of Hesse cease to reign, and be obliterated from among the number of independent states."

"I make my intentions known to the Pope in a few words," he wrote to Fesch. "If he does not acquiesce in my wishes, I shall reduce his

authority to the condition in which it was before the days of Charlemagne."

Napoleon thus often delivered his opinions and orders in the bombastic periods of characters in Corneille and Voltaire.

"I love power," he confessed to Roederer, "but I love it as an artist. I love it as a musician loves his violin. I love it to draw from it sounds, accords, and harmonies."

He improvised for hours at a stretch, like the ragged improvisatore in the market place of his native Ajaccio. He had often an irresistable flow of speech. Then, again, like Richelieu, he acted the connoisseur in dramatics, and, with elaborate emphasis, attempted to direct the current of stage endeavour. Fontanes read 'Les Templiers' of Raynouard, to the master, who liked some portions of the piece and objected to others. The play was produced and had some success. The Emperor still objected. "It seems to me," he thereupon suggested to Fouché, from Milan, "that the success of 'Les Templiers' leads the people to dwell upon this point of French history. That is well, but I do not think it would be wise to allow pieces taken from historical subjects of a period too close to our own times to be acted. I read in a news-

paper that it is proposed to act a tragedy on the subject of Henry IV. That epoch is near enough to ours to arouse popular passions. The stage requires antiquity, and, without restricting the theatre too much, I think you ought to prevent this, but not to allow your interference to appear. You might speak of it to M. Raynouard, who seems to be a man of ability. Why should you not induce him to write a tragedy upon the transition from the first to the second line? Instead of being a tyrant, he who should succeed would be the saviour of the nation. The oratorio of 'Saul' is no other than this; it is a great man succeeding a degenerate king."

Napoleon patronised the opera, and rewarded such composers as appealed to him. He did not fancy Cherubini, but he was much taken with Spontini and with Paesiello. He decorated Lesueur. He gave Grétry, the composer of 'Richard Cœur de Lion,' a pension of four thousand francs a year, and had his opera played fifteen consecutive nights by imperia command.

He consulted Fouché, his Minister of Police, on the 'Don Juan' of Mozart, before allowing its production. "I desire to know your mind on this piece," he dictated, "what you think of

it from the point of view how it will affect public opinion."

Even while abroad, Napoleon meddled in the administration of theatrical affairs in the capital.

"I charge you exclusively with surveillance of the Opéra till my return," he informed Cambacérès. "I do not wish to hear any more about their troubles. Establish severe discipline and have authority respected."

He generally knew to a fraction the amount of the illicit gains of functionaries under him. Ouvrard, a contractor, made a wager that Georges, the actress, would sup with him instead of keeping her known engagement to sup, on a specified night, at the Tuileries. He overcame her scruples by a bribe of two hundred thousand francs and won his bet. The day following, he was summoned before the Emperor.

"Monsieur Ouvrard," said he, "you have gained five millions by your contracts for the army in Spain. You will pay two into the imperial treasury without delay."

Thus Napoleon took his revenge.

He now and then occupied himself with the ballet. "Several artists have fled from Paris

and taken refuge in St. Petersburg," he notified Caulaincourt. "I beg that you will ignore this bad conduct. We have no lack of ballet girls and actresses in Paris." On one occasion he remonstrated thus with Rémusat. "You furnish me with no report respecting the administration of the theatres, and you have new pieces rehearsed without informing me. I learn that the 'Mort d'Abel' and a ballet are being rehearsed. You should not have any new piece rehearsed without my consent. Let me have a report on this." About a month later, he again instructed Rémusat. "'La Mort d'Abel' should be performed on the 20th March; the ballet of 'Persée et Andromède' on Easter Monday; 'Les Bayadères' a fortnight afterwards; 'Sophocle' and 'Armède' during the summer; 'Les Danaides' in the autumn; 'Les Sabines' at the end of May. As a general rule, I wish as many new pieces as possible in the month of Easter, as there are a great many foreigners in Paris for the fêtes."

Napoleon sometimes met Andrieux at Josephine's receptions. "Comedy," said he to the playwright one day, "corrects no one. The vices put on the stage are always so brilliant that people rather imitate them than otherwise.

But you, you can do better things than write comedies." Andrieux seems to have remembered this dictum on the ineffectuality of comedy to reform mankind, for in his play, 'Le Vieux Fat,' I find these verses which put in rhyme what had been said to him in prose.

> "Souvent des jeunes fats on a fait le portrait :
> Des graces que toujours sur le scène on leur donne
> Font qu'on les a joués sans corriger personne ;
> On trouve aimable en eux ce qui devrait choquer,
> On va les applaudir au lieu de s'en moquer."

Talma had played in 'Britannicus' at St. Cloud. There had been much applause. After the performance Napoleon spied Fontanes conversing with Chaptal in a retired corner of the hall. He approached the pair.

"Well, Fontanes," said he, "I hope you are satisfied with Talma."

"Sire, I have seen Lekain——"

"There you are again," interrupted the Emperor. "Always praising the ancients."

"Sire," replied Fontanes, "I abandon Cæsar and Alexander to your Majesty, but, pray, leave me Lekain."

Napoleon was ever fond of startling effects. One evening, they tell us, while he was working with Chaptal in his private cabinet, a servant

entered and announced Bourgoin, the actress of the Comédie-Française, with whom the Minister was currently reported to be on the best of terms.

The Emperor, who had beforehand arranged this untoward meeting, asked the actress to await his pleasure, and revelled in the trouble he had caused.

Chaptal, angry and nonplussed, brusquely thrust his papers into his portfolio, and took his leave. That same night he sent in his resignation.

Constant, the valet of Napoleon, is still another authority who corroborates the master's predilection for Corneille.

"I always saw on his table," says he, "a volume of the works of that great poet. Very often, while he walked up and down the room, I heard the Emperor declaim verses from 'Cinna,' or this tirade from 'La Mort de César':

> 'César, tu vas régner. Voici le jour auguste
> Où le peuple romain, pour toi toujours injuste—'

"At the theatre in St. Cloud the evening's entertainment consisted frequently only of shreds and patches of plays. They chose the act of one opera for production, then the act of another, a procedure which was very provoking to the spectators whom the first opera had perhaps begun

to interest. They also often produced comedies. The Emperor himself took much pleasure in these performances. How often have I seen him hold his sides with laughter while he witnessed Baptiste, the younger, in 'Les Héritiers.' Michaud, in 'La Partie de Chasse de Henri IV.,' also amused him."

Napoleon, however, was rarely interested in farce or comedy. Thus, when the 'Cinna' of Corneille was on the bill at the Français, followed by the 'Brueys et Palaprat' of Etienne, he remained to listen to the tragedy, though the temperature of the house was arctic, but he left before the farce was produced. His liaisons with actresses were confined to such women as could portray the tragic passions. Laverd, of the Théâtre-Français, was the only comedienne whom he was ever inclined to favour with his attentions. Soubrettes, with their simpering ways, he avoided. Ingenues, with their simulated innocence, he shunned.

Actresses who were too far advanced in years for their parts put him in ill humour. On one occasion, when he gave a state performance of the 'Cinna' of Corneille for the benefit of some princes and serene highnesses in Mayence, the capable but mature Raucourt was assigned to

the winsome part of Emilie. The heroine was to say, among other lines, this:

"Si j'ai séduit Cinna, j'en séduirai bien d'autres."

The house smiled with polite irony at the faded actress's presumption. After the performance, Napoleon summoned Rémusat, and upbraided him soundly for having brought ridicule on a fine play by casting an old actress for a juvenile part.

Talma was always welcome in the inner circle. The tragedian was at the palace one day when a functionary presented the petition of Lemercier, the playwright, for certain sums due him from the government as an indemnity for property appropriated. The Emperor testily waved the functionary aside.

"Do you not see that Talma is here and that he expects to read me a play they are to produce day after to-morrow? Let him wait!"

The actor, knowing the financial stress in which the playwright then lived, stepped forward and said with that freedom which he sometimes assumed—

"Sire, when we are hungry, we do not like to wait. Lemercier has been deprived of all his property. He is in distress. He ought to receive what is his due. That is most urgent."

Napoleon cast a savage look at this volunteer counsellor, and then, suddenly breaking into a smile, said to Daru—

"Do you hear the arbitrary verdict of Talma? Give me the report."

And he signed it.

He criticised plays and players in a bluff and blunt fashion, generally with a strong personal and professional bias. Thus, after the production of 'Tipoo Saib,' by De Jouy, he said to Talma, speaking of one of the leading characters in the drama, "Raymond is a brave fellow, but he talks too much. He gives advice, instead of taking it. He discusses orders, instead of obeying them. Doesn't he presume to save the British Ambassador? Why, if I had been in the place of the Sultan, I would have had the insolent fellow's head off with one blow of my sabre!"

Etienne, the playwright, who was a censor of plays under the imperial regime, was himself censured by the master censor. Napoleon took umbrage at this line in 'L'Intrigante' when the play was produced at the Tuileries:

> "Je suis sujet du prince et roi dans ma famille."

The line was promptly cut out.

He had, in a word, a soldier-politician's likes and dislikes in matters dramatic. He suffered 'Bélisaire,' by De Jouy, to be suppressed, because the play recalled to the memory of the public one of his generals then in exile. He enthusiastically lauded 'Hector,' by Luce de Lancival, because that play made him feel as though he were in the thick of battle.

Napoleon met an obstinate opponent to some of his pretensions in Pope Pius VII. The Emperor, accordingly, had the Pontiff brought from Rome to Fontainebleau, and in the chateau at that place occurred the interview vivified by the poetic art of Alfred de Vigny. We are told that during that historic meeting Napoleon raged and stormed as he paced the polished floor, while Pius VII. sat in a large, eagle-studded chair, attentive and calm. Napoleon made promises, threats, and boasts. Pius VII. simply answered with one word—

"Commediante!"

Napoleon overheard the word and was furious.

"Comedian! I, a comedian!" he exclaimed. "Ah, I will give you comedies such as will make you all cry like women and children! Come-

dian! Ah, you are mistaken, if you think to get the better of me by insolent coolness! My theatre is the world! The part I play is that of manager and author. As comedians I engage all of you—popes, kings, peoples! The thread by which I move you is—fear! Comedian! Ah, it would take a better man than you are to dare to applaud or to hiss me!"

Pius VII. moved uneasily in the chair for a moment, and then he checked the soldier's torrent of language with another word—

"Tragediante!"

Napoleon sobered in an instant and continued in more subdued tones.

"'Tis very true. Tragedian or comedian! All is acting—all has been costume with me for a long time, and will be so for ever! What fatigue, what littleness! Sitting, always sitting in full face for this party, in profile for that, according to their notions. . . . You see I am open-hearted with you. I have plans for the lives of forty emperors. I form one every morning and another every night. Life is too short to stand still."

He was fond of issuing army bulletins of an anecdotic and colloquial nature. They were printed in the 'Moniteur,' and some were re-

printed on loose sheets, and sold at low price, and widely circulated. These bulletins, sent out before or after a battle, recounted a few facts more or less distorted, and told homely and familiar incidents in which Napoleon was made to appear in the most favourable and heroic light. With his wide knowledge of human nature he was well aware that anecdotes are the small change of history, circulating where such large bills as pamphlets and books never penetrate. Hence the bulletins, prompted, if not written by him, form a noteworthy chapter in the literary history of his period.

Wherever he was, he endeavoured to impress the spectators of the stupendous drama in which he was the chief factor.

"Danzig has capitulated," he notified Clarke, War Minister at Berlin, "and my troops have entered the place. Publish this news in the Berlin journals. Have a salute fired at Spandau, and at other places. If you like, you can have a 'Te Deum' sung. Give this capture the greatest possible publicity."

He had the itch of notoriety. Edmund Kean never scanned the papers more eagerly than Napoleon perused the army reports. Talma never read play-house feuilletons with more

attention than his imperial master watched adverse critiques.

"A man called Bruguières," he informed Fouché, "has written a bad work entitled 'Napoléon en Prusse,' which people believe to be acknowledged by the government. All the sovereigns have sent him presents. Have this work criticised as it deserves."

Napoleon generally wrote in a special style, according to the person with whom he corresponded. He exaggerated his thoughts oftentimes in order to obtain results. Having one day written a very sharp, harsh letter to Marshal Baraguey d'Hilliers, he sent also the following note to the Minister of War: "I vigorously rebuked Baraguey d'Hilliers. He positively deserved it. But I exaggerated in order to startle him."

The master was eager to be seen and to be talked about. He had the player's craze for notice and comment. He knew that he had to be always within the public gaze.

"In Paris," said he, "they do not remember anything. If I remain a long time without doing something, I am lost. If they have not seen me three times at the theatre, they would have forgotten me."

When Chénier wrote his play, 'Le Couronnement de Cyrus,' he received preferment because Napoleon was gratified by the implied compliment. When Chénier, repenting of his sycophancy, published his 'Epitre à Voltaire,' full of sentiments like these :—

> "Tout passe, tout s'éteint, les conquérants périssent,
> Sur le front des héros les lauriers se flétrissent.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Le pouvoir absolu s'éfforcerait en vain
> D'anéantir l'ésprit né d'un souffle divin.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Tacite, en traits de flamme, accuse nos Séjans,
> Et son nom prononcé fait pâlir les tyrans—"

Napoleon let Chénier know of his displeasure.

He mixed in the cabals of opera singers and insisted that there be peace behind the scenes. "Everyone complains of the administration of operatic affairs by M. de Lucay," he objected. "If these imbroglios do not come to a stop, I shall put a good military man in charge who will see to it that matters march to the time of the drum beat."

"I have read some very bad verses that were sung at the Opéra," he complained to Champagny, from Berlin. "Since when is it cus-

tomary to allow at the Opéra what is allowed at the Vaudeville? I mean the introduction of impromptus. . . . Tell M. de Lucay that I am much displeased, and do you forbid that anything be sung at the Opéra which is not worthy of that great institution."

Napoleon is said to have been one of the devotees of Mars, the actress of the Comédie-Française. I am inclined to think, however, that his devotion to her has been much exaggerated. I accept the accounts of their amorous meetings at Rambouillet with considerable scepticism. They tell us that one day, at a review, he perceived her in the throng and spurred his horse towards the place where she stood. "Ah," said he, good-naturedly, "I see you are returning us the visits which we are so pleased to pay you at the Français."

He patronised the drama as he patronised the opera. He was by turns inquisitorial and indulgent, meddlesome and munificent. He bought private boxes. He distributed prizes and decorations. He paid actors and actresses liberally out of his own purse and from the public exchequer. Naturally he was provoked when the results of all his largesses were mediocre or futile. Discontented with the dramatists of his

own age, he invariably reverted to those of the past.

"One day, after having witnessed a performance of 'Cinna,'" remarks Bourrienne, "he said to me, 'If a man like Corneille were living in my time, I would make him my prime minister. It is not his poetry that I most admire, it is his powerful understanding, his vast knowledge of the human heart and his profound policy.'"

An insatiate reader while on his travels, Napoleon complained, when at Warsaw, in 1807, and when at Bayonne, in 1808, that his librarian at Paris did not keep him well supplied with books. "The Emperor," wrote the secretary to Barbier, "wants a portable library of a thousand volumes in 12mo., printed in good type without margin, and composed as nearly as possible of forty volumes on religion, forty of epics, forty of plays, sixty of poetry, a hundred of novels, sixty of history, the remainder, to make up the thousand, of historical memoirs.

"The religious works are to be the Old and New Testament, the Koran, a selection of the works of the Fathers of the Church, works respecting the Aryans, Calvinists, of Mythology, &c.

"The epics are to be Homer, Lucan, Tasso, Telemachus, The Henriade, &c."

Machiavelli, Fielding, Richardson, Montesquieu, Voltaire, Corneille, Racine, and Rousseau were also among the authors mentioned.

Napoleon was no bibliophile; cared nothing for finely bound and typographically perfect books. He preferred books with slight margins; books that took up little room. He flung pamphlets and novels out of the window of his carriage when he had finished with them. He used books only for the information which they gave him, and only presentation copies of certain works were by him ordered to be gorgeously bound and powdered with the imperial bees.

Even fashions were, at times, suggested by the autocrat. "I did not know," he wrote to Savary, then at St. Petersburg, "that you were so 'galant' as you have become. All the fashions for your pretty Russian ladies shall be forwarded. I will pay the expense myself. You must present them, saying that, having by chance opened the dispatch in which you asked for them, I wish to make the selection myself. You know that I understand toilette very well. Talleyrand will send actors and actresses to you."

He dictated the cut of plays, as he dictated the cut of garments.

After having seen a performance of the 'Agamemnon' of Lemercier, he said to the author:

"Your piece is no good. By what right does Strophus remonstrate with Clytemnestra? He is nothing but a valet."

"No, Sire," answered Lemercier, "he is not a valet. He is a dethroned monarch, a friend of Agamemnon."

"You are not well versed in court matters," ended the Emperor. "At court, the monarch alone amounts to something. The others are only valets."

Napoleon suppressed plays that alluded in the most remote manner to his divorce. He established a rigorous censorship and then lamented that there was no literature.

He imperiously craved to have men about him who would blazon his power and renown. He thought that he could create playwrights as he had created cardinals and marshals. "People complain," he grumbled to Cambacérès, "that we have no literature. 'Tis the fault of the Minister of the Interior."

He imagined that he could order romances and poems as he ordered war maps and field guns.

One day, he met Saint-Pierre. "Monsieur Bernardin," he asked, "when will you give us another 'Paul et Virginie' or 'Chaumière Indienne'? You should give us one every six months."

He flattered, rewarded, and pensioned men of letters, or he abused, persecuted, and humiliated them. "You and M. de Fontanes, as State Councillor and Grand Master, you I ought to imprison in Vincennes," he said to Ségur. "Tell the second class of the Institute that I will have no political subjects treated at its meetings. . . . If it disobeys, I will break it up as a club that is a nuisance."

When in a milder and more equable mood, he counselled his brother Joseph, then King of Naples, thus—

"You live too much with literary and with scientific men. They are like coquettes, with whom one should keep up an intercourse of gallantry, but of whom one should never dream of making a wife or a minister."

In every department the same arbitrary will was manifest.

"Spread the following reports in an official manner," he instructed Fouché. "They are, however, true. Spread them, first, in the salons, and then put them in the papers."

"I send you my approval relative to the expense of the scenery and the ballet of the 'Return of Ulysses,'" he further notified Fouché. "Have a detailed report made of this ballet, and see the first representation, so as to make sure there is nothing bad in it; you understand in what sense. The subject appears to me fine; it was I who gave it to Gardel."

Meanwhile, at home and abroad, in spite of strict surveillance, he was pestered by impertinent pasquinaders.

Arndt, Gentz, Kotzebue, Treitschke, the pamphleteers of Germany who aimed their poisoned shafts at him and strove to arouse their apathetic countrymen against his government, were especially obnoxious in his eyes. "Cousin," he wrote to Berthier, "I suppose you have had the booksellers of Augsburg and Nuremburg arrested. It is my intention that they be taken before a military tribunal and shot within twenty-four hours."

Napoleon was at one time well-nigh omnipotent. He centralized power in Paris, and had his power respected in most of the capitals of Europe. Francis of Austria found it prudent to bestow his daughter upon him in marriage. Alexander of Russia accepted his invitation to a conference at Erfurt. The small town was

thronged with princely notabilities. Talma and Duchesnois, and a contingent of players from the Comédie-Française, were summoned to the imperial rendezvous, and at extraordinary theatre parties interpreted classic plays to blue-blooded auditors.

"I will give you a fine parterre of kings," proudly said Napoleon to Talma.

They produced 'Cinna,' 'Andromaque,' 'Britannicus,' 'Zaire,' 'Oedipe,' 'Mithridate,' 'Iphigénie,' 'Phèdre,' 'Mahomet,' 'Manlius,' 'Bajazet,' 'La Mort de César,' 'Rodogune,' and 'Le Cid.'

A strong guard of grenadiers was posted at the entrance of the theatre. On the arrival of an emperor, the drums beat thrice; on the arrival of a king they beat twice. On one occasion, the sentinel, deceived by the outside of the King of Wurtemberg's carriage, ordered the triple salute to be given, on which the officer in command, in an angry tone, cried out, "Hold on there! It's only a king!"

"The choice of the pieces for those plays at Erfurt," says Talleyrand, "had been made with great care and art, the subjects having been taken from heroic times or great historical events. Napoleon's idea in causing heroic times

to appear on the stage was to mislead all that German nobility in the midst of which he was, and to carry them away by imagination into other regions. . . . In pieces drawn from history, the representation of which he ordered, the policy of some chief character always recalled some circumstances analogous to those which occurred daily since he himself had appeared on the stage of the world; and all that became the subject of flattering allusions. The hatred of Mithridates against the Romans called to mind Napoleon's hatred against England, and after hearing the following verses:—

> 'Ne vous figurez pas que de cette contrée,
> Par d'éternels remparts, Rome soit séparée,
> Je sais tous les chemins par où je dois passer,
> Et si la mort bientôt ne vient me traverser'—

Everybody whispered, 'Yes, he knows all the roads to success; yes, it must be borne in mind he knows them all.'

"The ideas of immortality, glory, undaunted bravery, and fatality which in 'Iphigénie' recur constantly, either as the chief idea or as accessory, served the purpose of his main thought, which was to arouse unceasing admiration in all who approached him. Talma had received orders to deliver slowly the following fine passage:

'L'honneur parle, il suffit, ce sont là nos oracles,
Les dieux sont de nos jours les maîtres souverains,
Mais, Seigneur, notre gloire est dans nos propres mains.
Pourquoi nous tourmenter de leurs ordres suprêmes?
Ne songeons qu'à nous rendre immortels comme eux-mêmes,
Et laissant faire au sort, courons où la valeur
Nous promet du destin aussi grand que le leur.'

"But the play of Napoleon's choice, that which indicated best the causes and the source of his power, was 'Mahomet,' because during the whole performance it seemed to him that he was the chief character. From the beginning of the first act . . . the eyes of all present were riveted on him, they listened to the actors, but could not help looking at him. . . . Every German prince must naturally have applied to himself the following verses uttered by Lafont in a dismal tone:

'Vois l'empire romain tombant de toutes parts,
Ce grand corps déchiré dont les membres épars
Languissent dispersés, sans honneur et sans vie!
Sur ces débris du monde élevons l'Arabie.
Il faut un nouveau culte, il faut de nouveaux fers,
Il faut un nouveau Dieu pour l'aveugle univers!'

"At this point, respect only prevented the audience from demonstrating their approval; the applause almost broke forth at the following verse:

'Qui la fait roi? Qui la couronné? La Victoire!'"

During the fêtes at Erfurt, in 1808, Napoleon first met Goethe. Chancellor Von Mueller furnishes this version of the interview between them.

Napoleon was at breakfast, Talleyrand and Daru standing by his side, Berthier and Savary behind. Napoleon looked at the poet fixedly, and then said:

"Vous êtes un homme."

Then Napoleon asked Goethe his age.

"Sixty."

"You are well preserved. I hear you have written tragedies."

Daru here interposed and said that Goethe had translated the 'Mahomet' of Voltaire.

"It is not a good piece," said Napoleon.

They discussed 'Werther,' and the Emperor found fault with some parts of the novel, but soon resumed discussing the drama.

Goethe later remarked that he criticised like a man who had studied the tragic stage with the attention of a criminal judge. He always proved of all pieces in which fate played a part.

"These pieces," said he, "belong to the dark ages. Besides, what do they mean by fate? Politics, that's what I call fate."

At a second interview Napoleon touched on Shakespeare.

"Je suis étonné qu'un grand ésprit comme vous n'aime pas les genres tranchés," said the Emperor to the poet.

"Tragedy should be the school of kings and people. That is the highest mission which the poet can have. You, for instance, you ought to write on the death of Cæsar. You could do it in a grander way than Voltaire did it. It would be the finest task of your life to show the world how Cæsar would have benefited humanity, how everything would have been different if they had only allowed him to put his lofty plans into execution. I must insist that you come to Paris. There you will obtain a wider view of men and things."

Talleyrand gives this account of the meeting between these two men.

"Monsieur Goethe, I am delighted to see you."

"Sire, I see that, when your Majesty travels, you do not neglect to notice even the most insignificant persons."

"I know you are Germany's first dramatic poet."

"Sire, you wrong our country. We are under

the impression we have of our great men. Schiller, Lessing, and Wieland are surely known to your Majesty."

"I confess I hardly know them. However, I have read 'La Guerre de Trente Ans,' and that, I beg your pardon, seemed to me to furnish dramatic subjects only worthy of our boulevards."

"Sire, I do not know your boulevards, but I suppose that popular plays are given there. I am sorry to hear you judge so severely one of the greatest geniuses of modern times."

. . . . .

"I should be delighted to see Monsieur Wieland."

"If your Majesty will allow me to ask him, I feel certain that he will come here directly."

"Does he speak French?"

"He knows it, and has corrected several French translations of his works."

"While you are here, you must go every night to our plays. It will not do you any harm to see good French tragedies."

"I will go willingly. I must confess to your Majesty that it was my intention, for I have translated, or rather imitated, some French pieces."

"Which ones?"

"'Mahomet' and 'Tancrède.'"

"I shall ask Rémusat if he has any actors here to play them. I should be very glad for you to see them represented in our language. You are not as strict as we are in theatrical rules."

"Sire, unity with us is not so essential."

"How do you find our sojourn here?"

"Very brilliant, Sire, and I hope it will be useful to our country."

"Are your people happy?"

"They hope to be so soon."

"Monsieur Goethe, you ought to remain with us during the whole of our stay, and write your impressions of the grand sight we are offering."

"Ah, Sire, it would require the pen of some great writer of antiquity to undertake such a task."

"Are you an admirer of Tacitus?"

"Yes, Sire, I admire him very much."

"Well, I don't. But we shall talk of that another time. Write and tell Monsieur Wieland to come here. . . . Have you already seen the Czar?"

"No, Sire, never; but I hope to be introduced to him."

"He speaks your language. Should you write

anything on the Erfurt interview you must dedicate it to him."

"Sire, it is not my habit to do so. When I first commenced to write, I made it a principle never to dedicate anything to anyone, in order that I should never repent it."

"The great writers of Louis XIV. time were not of your opinion."

"But your Majesty cannot be sure that they never repented doing what they did."

"What has become of the scoundrel, Kotzebue?"

"Sire, they say that he is in Siberia, and that your Majesty will solicit his pardon from the Czar."

"But he is not the man for me."

"Sire, he has been very unfortunate, and is a man of great talent."

"Good-bye, Monsieur Goethe."

I have heard Napoleon compared with Machiavelli. He certainly played his august guests in the theatre at Weimar a trick worthy of that astute statesman. One night, and one night only, he had his troupe perform 'La Mort de César,' and he watched, through that opera-glass of his, the faces of the audience as it listened to this drama enacted by Talma. The

Emperor surmised that there was not one among those guests who did not in his heart wish the death of the host who had humiliated them all. The great conqueror of modern times took a sardonic delight in forcing his enemies to witness on the mimic stage the assassination of the great conqueror of antiquity.

Napoleon fought women with the same relentless pertinacity that he fought men, if the women dared to potter in politics.

He stopped at no meannesses to encompass his ends, personal or political. He would go out of his way to whisper innuendoes and blast reputations. Thus he spread the bulletins propagating the scandalous rumours of intimacy between Alexander of Russia and Luisa of Prussia. Thus, when Alexander became enthralled by Bourgoin, the actress, at Erfurt, he is said to have discouraged him.

"I would not advise you," said he, "to make her any advances."

"You believe that she would decline?"

"Not that, but to-morrow is mail day, and in five days all Paris would be informed of your Majesty's physical graces. Besides, — your health interests me. . . . Therefore I hope you will be able to resist temptation."

I have said that Napoleon was an actor. His behaviour at the meeting with Pope Pius VII. at Fontainebleau and his bearing at the nuptials with Marie Louise at Notre Dame amply illustrate this view of his character. His magnanimity to Countess Hatzfeld, flinging into the fire the papers incriminating her husband, also savours of the melodramatic. But there are other proofs, and the most convincing are to be found in his correspondence. When Poland expected him to champion her cause, he made a double play, one in the lobby and another behind the footlights. He had two modes of speech—one cold, hard, and matter-of-fact; the other grandiloquent, sentimental, and rhetorical.

When he was behind the scenes, he wrote thus bluntly to Fouché.

"The letter which you have sent me written by Kosciuszko to his compatriots is ridiculous: it is only an amplification of rhetoric. . . . If Kosciuszko wants to come, well and good. If not, he can stay away."

When before the public, Napoleon issued this bulletin. "It is difficult to describe the enthusiasm of the Poles. Our entrance into this great city of Warsaw was a triumph, and the sentiments which the Poles of all classes manifest since our

arrival cannot be expressed in words. . . The throne of Poland, will it rise from its ashes? And this great nation, will it take its place again as an independent power? From the depths of the tomb will it come to life? God alone, who holds in His hands the combination of all events, is the arbiter of this mighty political problem."

When behind the scenes again, on the very next day, Napoleon removed the grease paint and cast away the wig of the liberator, and wrote to Murat thus:—

"I received your letter of the 29th November, eleven o'clock at night. The Poles, who are so circumspect, ask so many guarantees before declaring themselves, are egotists whom the love of country does not fire. I am old in my knowledge of men. My greatness is not based on my alliance with a few thousand Poles."

Abbé de Pradt gives an apparently reliable account of Napoleon when he heard of the rout of his army in Russia. The Emperor stalked about and railed like a tragedian who had failed to score. He was violent and incoherent. "From the sublime to the ridiculous there is but a step," he cried. "Dangers, not at all! I live on excitement! The more trouble, the better I feel! Only good-for-nothing kings grow fat

in their palaces. I thrive on horseback and in the camp. Bah, my army is superb! I have a hundred thousand men. I have always beaten the Russians. They don't dare face us! They are no longer the soldiers of Friedland and Eylau. I'll face them at Wilna. I shall look for three hundred thousand men. I've been in trouble before. At Marengo I was beaten up to six in the evening. The next day I was master of Italy!"

Broglie reinforces De Pradt's version of Napoleon's histrionism by this hint given in the description of the scene which transpired when the master had learned of the Pope's resistance to him. "The Emperor came into the hall at the usual hour. I will not say that his face was severe. I will say rather that he wore on his face the mask of severity. Everything was acted in the scene which he prepared."

Talma always appeared most deferential when favoured with the views of Napoleon on stagecraft. Here is another extract from one of their reported conversations:

"You show too plainly that Nero is a despot," said Napoleon. "You show it the moment you come on the stage. According to Racine's intention, as indicated in the opening scenes of the piece, Nero must not appear cruel. It is

only when he is crossed in love and becomes jealous that his violent character is entirely developed. You ought, therefore, to keep all the strength of expression for the last acts."

Napoleon also criticised adversely Talma's impersonation of Cæsar in 'La Mort de Pompée,' for he is reported to have said:

"You do not grasp your part. You seem convinced when you pronounce the verse:

'Pour moi qui tiens le trône égal à l'infamie.'

"Cæsar did not believe a word of what he said. He only spoke that way because he was surrounded by Romans, whom it was necessary to persuade that he had a horror of the throne. But he was himself far from believing that the throne, which was already the object of his full ambition, was such a detestable thing. You must not make him talk as though he meant what he said."

Talma took the hint and played the part as the imperial critic had suggested. "That's well done," said the master, after the performance, "I recognise Cæsar."

Napoleon, meanwhile, was struggling with defeat and disaster. His mind, however, was clear. His resolve was high. His energy was indomitable. I need hardly chronicle the fact

that he promulgated from Moscow, in 1812, in the hours of adversity, the notable decree which fixed on its present generous basis the Comédie-Française.

Villemain reports that Napoleon and Narbonne discussed the drama amid the semi-barbaric magnificence of the palace of the Czars. "You, my dear Narbonne," said the Emperor, walking with long strides up and down the waxed parquet, "I am certain you liked the theatre when you were young, and I suppose you were a great connoisseur. It is true, I believe, you cared only for comedy, refined drawing-room comedy, Celimene, Mademoiselle Contat."

At the name of the actress, thus rapidly interjected, Napoleon smiled. Then he continued gravely:

"I love, above all, tragedy—lofty and sublime tragedy as Corneille represents it. Great men are more truthfully depicted in tragedy than in history. . . . You always see them at the crises which bring out their qualities. . . . I am thankful to tragedy for thus placing certain men on pedestals. . . . I would have wished that our poets could have done this for modern heroes. . . . What are the poets of my time

thinking about? Chénier puts me out of patience with his 'Cambyse.' . . . I do not bar, in this department, even foreign themes. What a tragedy, for instance, a man of talent could have built around that figure of granite, Peter the Great!"

Napoleon fell more and more into the habit of speaking like a tragic actor.

"I continue my military dispositions in Spain," he advised Talleyrand. "This tragedy, if I am not mistaken, is at its fifth act. The denouement is in sight."

"I have but one passion," he said, with ecstatic exultation, to Roederer, "one mistress, and that is France. I sleep with her. She has never been false to me. She lavishes her blood, her treasures on me. If I need five hundred thousand men, she gives them to me."

David, Gros, Gérard, Guérin, Isabey, Vernet, the eminent artists of his time, found in him a fertile subject for their brushes and their pencils.

"David, I salute you," said Napoleon to the painter one day, raising his hat.

He attitudinised superbly.

His discourses to the army were made soul-stirring. He had them carefully prepared. On one occasion he suspected that his men were

wavering on the eve of battle. He turned to Rapp and exclaimed, "I must rouse them." Then he dictated this: "Soldiers, it is a year this very hour since you were on the field of Austerlitz, where the Russians fled in disorder or surrendered up their arms to their conquerors. You have braved all, surmounted all; every obstacle has fled at your approach. The Russians have in vain endeavoured to defend the capital of ancient and illustrious Poland. The French eagle hovers over the Vistula. . . . Soldiers, we will not lay down our arms until a general peace has secured the power of our allies and has restored to us our colonies and our freedom of trade. Why should the Russians have the right of opposing destiny, and thwarting our just designs? They and we are still the soldiers of Austerlitz!"

When he dictated one of these dithyrambic manifestoes, he was as one inspired. His eyes blazed. His words came fast. When he read over what the secretary had written, he smiled triumphantly at the effect which he expected that a particular phrase would produce. He always resorted to pronunciamientos, as we have seen, before he entered upon important engagements. Here is the one which Napoleon sent forth prior to

Waterloo, the sonorous battle cry of a desperate man:

"Soldiers! This day is the anniversary of Marengo and Friedland, which twice decided the destiny of Europe. Then, as after the battles of Austerlitz and Wagram, we were too generous. We believed in the protestations and oaths of princes to whom we left their thrones. Now, however, leagued together, they strike at the independence and sacred rights of France. They have committed unjust aggressions. Let us march forward and meet them! Are we not still the same men? Soldiers, at Jena, these Prussians, now so arrogant, were three to one! At Montmirail, six to one! . . . Madmen! One moment of prosperity has turned their heads! To oppress and humiliate the people of France is out of their power. Once entering our territory, they will find their doom. Soldiers, we have forced marches before us, battles to fight, and dangers to encounter. But, firm in resolution, victory will be ours! The honour and happiness of our country are at stake! In short, Frenchmen, the hour has arrived when we must conquer or die!"

The Exile

V.

THE EXILE

NAPOLEON, brought to bay and beaten by his united foes, an exile at St. Helena, was almost as precise and punctilious there as he had been at the Malmaison and the Tuileries. He established a court in that circumscribed domain and ruled over it with a brave show of assurance. He was gay and depressed, by turns; he was peevish and philosophical. He read, wrote, chatted, rode, and walked. Most frequently he dictated his memoirs and opinions to such companions of his solitude as Gourgaud, Montholon, and Las Cases. Often he launched pugnacious paradoxes. Looking with longing eyes over the vast waste of ocean, the illustrious commander now had leisure to realise how evanescent is the gold-red glow of human grandeur.

I find many allusions by him to plays and players while he languished under those tropical

skies. He did not resign his opera-glass when he resigned his sceptre.

"After dinner," says Las Cases, "we resumed our readings. The Emperor read the 'Agamemnon' of Æschylus, which he very much admired for its great force and simplicity. We were particularly struck with the graduation of terror which characterises the productions of the father of tragedy. It was observed that this was the first spark to which the light of the modern drama may be traced. 'Agamemnon' being ended, the Emperor asked for the 'Œdipus' of Sophocles, which also interested us exceedingly; and the Emperor expressed his regret at not having had it performed at St. Cloud. Talma had always opposed the idea, but the Emperor was sorry that he had relinquished it. 'Not,' said he, 'that I wished to correct our drama by antique models. Heaven forbid! But I merely wished to have an opportunity of judging how far ancient compositions would have harmonised with modern notions.'"

Classicist by education, Napoleon believed in the dramatic rules laid down by Aristotle. Hence he never understood Shakespeare and always disparaged him. He at times assumed a professorial tone, as when, for instance, he pointed out that

Seneca, in his play 'Medea,' had prophesied the discovery of America.

> "Venient annis secula seris,
> Quibus Oceanus vincula rerum
> Laxet, et ingens pateat tellus,
> Tethysque novus deteget orbes,
> Nec sit terris ultima Thule."

Napoleon often thought of the strong personality of Talma. He told Las Cases one day that he would have decorated the actor, had he not feared an outcry on the part of popular prejudice.

The Emperor met the actor several times, it will be remembered, after his first exile, and at one of these meetings the following conversation is said to have taken place.

"So, Talma, Chateaubriand says that you gave me lessons how to act the imperator. Well, I take his hint as a compliment, for it shows that I must at least have played my part well."

The time passed with little variety of interruption. Napoleon still displayed the histrionic side of his nature, still delighted in histrionic phrases. One day, his usual task being done, he strolled out towards the town, until he came within sight of the road and shipping. On his return, he met Mrs. Balcombe and Mrs. Stuart,

who was on her way back from Bombay to England. The Emperor conversed with her on the manners and customs of England, and on the inconveniences of a long voyage at sea, particularly to the ladies. He alluded to Scotland, Mrs. Stuart's native country, expatiated on the genius of Ossian, and congratulated his fair interlocutor on the preservation of her clear, northern complexion. While the parties were thus engaged, some heavily burdened slaves passed near to them. Mrs. Balcombe motioned them to make a detour; but the Emperor interposed, exclaiming, "Respect the burden, Madame!"

Antommarchi, the physician, tells us what happened while Napoleon was shaving himself one morning. He was in his shirt, his head uncovered, with two valets at his side, one holding the glass and a towel, the other the rest of the apparatus. The Emperor spread the soap over one side of his face, put down the brush, wiped his hands and mouth, took a razor dipped in hot water and shaved the right side with singular dexterity.

"Is it done, Noverraz?"

"Yes, Sire."

"Well, then, face about. Come, villain, quick. Stand still."

The light fell on the left side, which, after applying the lather, he shaved in the same manner and with the same dexterity. He drew his hand over his chin.

"Raise the glass. Am I quite right?"

"Quite so, Sire."

"Not a hair has escaped me. What say you?"

"No, Sire," replied the valet de chambre.

"No! I think I perceive a hair. Lift up the glass, place it in a better light. How, rascal! Flattery! You deceive me at St. Helena? On this rock? You, too, are an accomplice."

With this, he gave them both a box on the ear, laughed and joked in his most pleasant manner.

Baron Stürmer, the diplomatic representative of Austria in St. Helena, wrote thus to Metternich, giving a graphic contemporary sketch of some of the doings of the prisoner. "In his leisure hours he amuses himself by declaiming before his French friends, who listen to him with rapture. He often indulges in this recreation after his meals, which, in this manner, are protracted far into the night. He most affects the rôle of Nero in 'Britannicus,' and that of Augustus in 'Cinna.' He assumes, while thus

declaiming, the tone and poses of Talma, whom he likes to imitate."

Of all his enemies, Napoleon, while in exile, hated Talleyrand with the bitterest hatred. I explain this by the fact that they were both actors. During years collaborators in the comedy-melodrama of statecraft, Napoleon and Talleyrand had never trusted or loved each other. As long as their interests merged, the soldier and the diplomat played their respective parts in the same play without much apparent friction. Talleyrand bowed courteously in public, while Napoleon took his curtain calls, but behind the scenes he bombarded him with venomous bon-mots. During years there was this polite truce. When the diplomat finally perceived that the end of the play was near, and that the soldier was losing his hold upon his audiences, he joined the chorus of his enemies in pit, balcony, and orchestra, and acclaimed the new master. Napoleon neither forgot nor forgave this treachery. As much as in his day of greatest glory he lived and dreamed, while in banishment, under the glamour of the stage world.

"To which theatre shall we go to-night?" he asked jocularly, at dessert, on one occasion. "Shall we hear Talma or Fleury?"

Lord Holland records that he frequently fell asleep while they read aloud to him, but that he was most observant of others who slept while he was reading.

"Madame Montholon, you are asleep," was a frequent ejaculation of his.

Napoleon, according to Madame de Rémusat, was never particularly partial to Molière. He now objected to one of his most famous plays on moral grounds.

"The whole of 'Tartufe,'" he remarked, "is unquestionably finished with the hand of a master; it is one of the chefs-d'œuvre of an inimitable writer. This piece is, however, marked with such a character that I am not at all surprised that its appearance should have been the subject of interesting negotiations at Versailles and of a great deal of hesitation on the part of Louis XIV. If I have a right to be astonished at anything, it is at his allowing it to be performed. It holds out, in my mind, devotion under such odious colours; a certain scene presents so decisive a situation, so completely indecent, that, for my own part, I do not hesitate to say, if the comedy had been written in my time, I would not have allowed it to be represented."

Official censors of works of literature or of works of art are always more or less amusing in their efforts to be conventionally conscientious, but when Napoleon attempted to play the part of a moral dictator he became almost grotesque in his blundering awkwardness.

Neither time nor exile eradicated from his heart his tremendous egotism. He infused the secretaries, who wrote his bulletins and his letters, with that egotism. They became the most expert press agents a gifted player ever had in his employ. They caught his manner. They attributed pithy sallies to him. Gradually and unconsciously, like many another stage star, Napoleon came to believe that he had said and written what he had perhaps only inspired and signed.

Impatient of rhetoric in others, he was himself a cunning dealer in phrases. He read or heard the classic dramatists so often that he echoed their academic cadence and their high-sounding heroics. His proclamations often were more redolent of the oil of the student lamp than of the powder of the battle-field.

"Soldiers! In my exile I have heard your voice. I have come back in spite of all obstacles and all dangers. Your general, called to the

throne by the choice of the people, and raised on your shields, is restored to you. Come and join him! Mount the tri-coloured cockade! You wore it in the days of our greatness. We must forget that we have been the masters of nations; but we must not suffer any to intermeddle in our affairs. Who would pretend to be master over us? Who would have the power? Resume those eagles which you had at Ulm, at Austerlitz, at Jena, at Eylau, at Wagram, at Friedland, at Tudela, at Eckmuhl, at Essling, at Smolensko, at the Moscowa, at Lutzen, at Wurtzen, at Montmirail! The veterans of the Sambre and Meuse, of the Rhine, of Italy, of Egypt, of the West, of the Grand Army, are humiliated; their honourable scars are despised; their successes would be crimes; the brave would be rebels if, as the enemies of the people pretend, the legitimate sovereigns were in the midst of the foreign armies. Honours, recompenses, favours are alone reserved to those who have served with them against the country and against us. Soldiers! Come and range yourselves under the banners of your chief! His existence is only made up of yours; his rights are only those of the people and yours; his interest, his honour, his glory are no other than your interest, your honour, and

your glory. Victory shall march at a charging step; the eagle with the national colours shall fly from steeple to steeple till it reaches the towers of Notre Dame!"

Napoleon, in banishment, expressed admiration of 'Le Mariage de Figaro,' by Beaumarchais, though he did not care for the man who wrote it. He spoke slightingly of 'Le Père de Famille,' by Diderot, of 'Mélanie,' by La Harpe, and of 'Turcaret,' by Le Sage. Arnault, author of 'Marius,' remained a favourite of his to the end, and he left him one hundred thousand francs in his will.

"He liked reading and conversation . . ." writes Bertrand. "He felt that his end was approaching and he frequently recited the passage from 'Zaire' which finishes with this line:

'A revoir Paris je ne dois plus prétendre.'

"Nevertheless, the hope of leaving this dreadful country often presented itself to his imagination. . . . Vain hopes! Vain projects! . . . He often said to us in the evening, 'Where shall we go? To the Théâtre-Français or to the Opéra?' And then he would read a tragedy by Corneille, Voltaire, or Racine; an opera of Quinault's, or one of the comedies of Molière."

Elizabeth Balcombe, then a bright girl of sixteen, daughter of a resident, was a pet of Napoleon's on the island, and he sometimes romped with her in boyish glee. Later, as Mrs. Abell, she reproduced her souvenirs of him at this period of his life.

"Napoleon," says she, "was a great admirer of Talma. He said he was the truest actor to nature that ever trod the boards. He was on very intimate and familiar footing with him. I told him that I heard he took lessons from Talma how he was to sit on his throne. He said he had been often asked if such was the case, and that he one day mentioned the report to the great actor, at the same time remarking to him, 'C'est un signe que je m'y tiens bien.' He often spoke of Mademoiselle Georges, whom he represented as being very talented, and transcendentally beautiful."

His memory was as ready and retentive as ever. "Various subjects," said he, "and affairs are stored away in my brain as in a chest of drawers. When I want to take up any special business, I shut one drawer and open another. None of them ever gets mixed, and never does this incommode me or fatigue me. If I feel sleepy, I shut all the drawers and go to sleep."

Tragedy still found more favour with him than comedy. "He sent for a volume of Racine," says Las Cases, "and at first began to read the comedy of 'Les Plaideurs,' but, after a scene or two, he turned to 'Britannicus,' which he read to us."

"Though Racine has produced chefs-d'œuvre in themselves," said he, after dinner one night, "yet he has diffused over them a perpetual air of insipidity. Love is eternally introduced, with its tone of languor and its tiresome accompaniments. But these faults must not be attributed entirely to Racine, but to the manners of the age in which he wrote. Love was then, at even a later period, the whole business of life with everyone. This is always the case when society is in a state of idleness. As for us . . . our thoughts have been cruelly turned to other subjects by the great events of the Revolution"

Voltaire was disparagingly noticed by Napoleon. Las Cases tells us that 'Brutus,' 'Œdipe,' and 'Mithridate' were dissected by him in hypercritical terms.

"It is astonishing," said he, "how little he will bear reading. When the pomp of diction and the prestige of stage setting no longer delude the analytic sense and the sense of taste, he im-

mediately loses one hundred per cent. You would hardly believe that, at the time of the Revolution, Voltaire had dethroned Corneille and Racine. People were asleep over the beauties of their works. The First Consul, it was, who awakened interest in them."

Marchand reproduces what he professes to be the exile's emendations of the 'Mahomet' of Voltaire.

The fact remains, however, that Napoleon often quoted that dramatic poet, frequently had him played, and was especially electrified by these lines from 'Mahomet' which so exactly fitted his own marvellous career.

"Les mortels sont égaux; ce n'est point la naissance,
C'est la seule vertu qui fait leur différence.
Il est de ceux ésprits favorisés des cieux
Qui sont tout par eux-mêmes, et rien par leurs aieux.
Tel est l'homme, en un mot, que j'ai choisi pour maître,
Lui seul dans l'univers, a le merite de l'être,
Tout mortel à sa loi doit un jour obéir!"

I do not for a moment wish to convey the impression that the exile devoted the major part of his hours to the discussion of dramatics. He was busy mostly with the history of his own campaigns. He treated also of Cæsar and Scipio and Hannibal. O'Meara tells us that he often worked at his commen-

taries upon Frederick the Great until two and three o'clock in the morning. He also commented on the exploits of Condé and Turenne and Marlborough. But the records show that, amid all his other occupations, he referred to the stage often enough to indicate how deeply he had been influenced by its representatives.

There was something pathetic in the last days of the fallen ruler, for, insidiously and remorselessly, the hereditary cancer and the deadly climate were undermining his constitution. Napoleon became more and more listless and more and more moody.

"I feel uncomfortable," said he to Antommarchi, one day. "I should wish to sleep, to read, to do—I don't know what. Ring for Marchand, let him bring me some books, and close the windows. I shall go to bed, and see in a little while whether I am better. But here is Racine, Doctor. Now, you are on the stage and I am listening. 'Andromaque'! Ah, that is the play for unfortunate fathers!"

"Sire, if it were Metastasio!"

"O, you are afraid of your accent! The metre of the poetry will conceal your Italian inflections. Begin!"

"I hesitated," continued Antommarchi, "and he took the book, read a few lines, and let the volume escape from his hands. He had fallen upon this celebrated passage:

"Je passais jusqu'aux lieux où l'on garde mon fils,
Puisqu'une fois le jour vous souffrez que je voie
Le seul bien qui me reste et d'Hector et de Troye:
J'allais, Seigneur, pleurer un moment avec lui;
Je ne l'ai point encore embrassé d'aujourd'hui."

The exile was moved by the poet's words. Souvenirs of his son, separated from him by the force of circumstances, came to him. He shaded his eyes with his hand, and asked to be left alone.

Napoleon, in his latter days, spoke a good word for one of the most persistent of his opponents. His self-esteem was flattered by the happy hyperbole attributed to that opponent. "Chateaubriand," said he, "received from nature the sacred fire. His works prove it. His style is not that of Racine, but that of the prophet. Only he could with impunity have said in the House of Peers that the grey coat and hat of Napoleon, placed at the end of a stick on the coast of Brest, would make Europe rush to arms."

"We resumed our reading," says Las Cases. "Our stock of novels was exhausted, and plays

occupied our attention for the future, tragedies in particular. The Emperor is uncommonly fond of analyzing them. . . . He remembers an immense quantity of poetry, which he learned when he was eighteen years old, at which time he says he knew much more than he does at present. . . . He greatly admires Corneille."

Napoleon would have said of that poet at St. Helena what he said of him at St. Cloud.

"Tragedy fires the soul, elevates the heart, and is calculated to generate heroes Considered from this point of view, perhaps France owes to Corneille a part of her great actions, and, gentlemen, if he lived in my time, I would make him a prince!"

They brought pamphlets from the outer world while he was an exile, and he read them and discussed them. He despised the petty writers who assailed his reputation. "I am doomed to become the prey of libel writers," he said, "but I have little fear of becoming their victim. They will gnaw at granite. My fame rests upon facts which mere words cannot destroy. . . . In spite of all libels, I have no fear for my memory."

I imagine that his thoughts were often beyond the grave. "I should like to be my own

posterity," he once remarked to Joseph. "I should like to be present at a performance where a poet like the great Corneille would make me breathe again, and think, and speak."

Death, meanwhile, was rapidly approaching. Towards the end of the year 1820, Napoleon walked with difficulty, and required assistance even to reach the chair in his garden. He became nearly incapable of the slightest action. "Here I am, Doctor," said he to Antommarchi one day, "at my last cast. No more energy or strength left; I bend under the load. . . . I am going. I feel that my hour is coming." The news of the demise of his sister Elisa affected him deeply. After a struggle with his feelings, which had nearly overpowered him, he rose, supported himself on his physician's arm, and, regarding him steadfastly, said, "Well, Doctor, you see Elisa has just shown me the way. My turn cannot be far off. What think you?"

"Your Majesty is in no danger. You are still reserved for some glorious enterprise."

"Ah, Doctor! I have neither strength nor activity for anything. . . . You strive in vain to give me hopes, to recall life ready to expire. Your care can do nothing in spite of fate: it

is immovable. There is no appeal from its decisions. Behold, my good friend, how I look on my situation. As for me, all is over. I repeat it to you, my days will soon close on this miserable rock."

"We returned," says Antommarchi, "into his room. Napoleon lay down in bed."

"Close my windows," he said. "Leave me to myself. I will send for you by and by. What a delightful thing rest is! I would not exchange it for all the thrones in the world! What a change! How I am fallen! I, whose activity was boundless, whose mind never slumbered, am now plunged into a lethargic stupor, so that it requires an effort to raise my eyelids. I sometimes dictated to four or five secretaries, who wrote as fast as words could be uttered: but then I was Napoleon—now I am no longer anything. My strength—my faculties forsake me. I do not live—I merely exist!"

Conclusion

CONCLUSION

I CANNOT tell how often Napoleon used his opera-glass. I do not know in what private collection or in what curiosity shop that opera-glass now lies. I think we may safely conclude, however, that the man who held it in his hands was unmistakably influenced by playwrights and players, and was himself one of the most sublime of the histrions of history.

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